

THERAPEUTIC PAIN MANAGEMENT

Course Syllabus

Advanced pain reasoning, therapeutic alliance, assessment, education, and patient-centered care planning

Course Overview

The Therapeutic Pain Management Course is an 8-week, specialist-level course designed to help clinicians move beyond generic pain education and routine intervention selection. Pain presentations are often shaped by tissue irritability, nervous system sensitivity, fear, prior experiences, sleep, stress, beliefs, medical factors, social context, and the therapeutic relationship. This course trains participants to reason through that complexity, assess pain more effectively, communicate with precision, and select patient-centered strategies that support function, confidence, and self-management.

Course emphasis

This is not a collection of pain neuroscience phrases or a list of chronic pain techniques. It is an advanced clinical reasoning course focused on how clinicians understand the pain experience, build trust, identify meaningful contributors, communicate without dismissing the patient, and match education, activity, conservative care, medical co-management, and behavior-change strategies to the person in front of them.

Course Details

Item	Details
Course format	Asynchronous lectures and readings, four two-week learning blocks, block quizzes or knowledge checks, discussion-board application, peer responses, and clinical reflection activities.
Virtual didactic course	November 2-December 27th
Live virtual discussions	November 11, November 25, December 9, and December 23 from 7:00-9:00 PM EST
Weekend intensive	Not applicable. This course does not include a weekend intensive lab.
Course materials	All assigned materials are available/downloadable through the learning management system, Talent. Participants are responsible for reviewing materials before completing quizzes and discussion activities.

Course Faculty

Role	Instructor
Primary Instructor	Jack Dixon, PT, DPT, OCS JDixon@highbarhealth.com 443-223-5619
Faculty Adjunct	Conor Bray Cbray@highbarhealth.com

Course Purpose

This course is designed to strengthen the clinician's ability to reason through pain presentations with greater clarity, empathy, and clinical precision. By the end of the course, participants should be better prepared to:

- Use pain epidemiology, risk factors, and patient context to inform clinical reasoning and prognosis.
- Apply pain terminology and pain-mechanism concepts without reducing the patient to a label or dismissing the lived experience of pain.
- Build a therapeutic alliance that supports trust, behavior change, patient buy-in, and shared decision-making.
- Select pain assessment strategies based on the clinical question they are meant to answer.
- Integrate conservative care, medical management considerations, activity modification, graded exposure, and patient education into a coherent plan.
- Communicate pain neuroscience education in a way that is individualized, practical, and clinically useful.
- Recognize how placebo, nocebo, expectation, language, and clinical context can influence outcomes ethically and meaningfully.

Course Learning Objectives

1. Describe relevant pain epidemiology, risk factors, and contributors to pain-related disability.
2. Use current pain terminology to explain and reason through acute, persistent, nociceptive, neuropathic, and nociplastic pain presentations.
3. Apply therapeutic alliance principles to improve patient engagement, communication, and self-management.
4. Select pain assessment tools and clinical questions based on the decision each assessment is meant to inform.
5. Interpret patient beliefs, fear, expectations, prior experiences, sleep, stress, and contextual factors as meaningful modifiers of pain and function.
6. Compare conservative and medical management strategies for chronic pain and identify when co-management or referral may be appropriate.
7. Deliver pain neuroscience education and related education strategies in a patient-specific, non-dismissive, and behaviorally useful manner.
8. Explain the placebo effect, nocebo effect, expectancy, and clinical context in a way that supports ethical and effective care.

Course Structure

The course is organized into four two-week learning blocks. Each block integrates assigned lectures, required readings, discussion-board application, peer interaction, and knowledge checks or assignments as directed by faculty.

Learning component	Primary role	Expected learner focus
Asynchronous lectures and readings	Build advanced foundation	Develop shared language, pain concepts, evidence-informed principles, and a framework for patient-centered pain reasoning.
Block quizzes or knowledge checks	Reinforce understanding	Use course concepts to confirm comprehension and identify areas that need further review.
Discussion-board application	Apply reasoning	Connect pain science, assessment, communication, and management concepts to realistic patient care decisions.
Peer responses and loop closure	Refine thinking	Respond to colleagues, consider alternative viewpoints, and strengthen reasoning through professional dialogue.

Because this course does not include a weekend intensive lab, the primary application spaces are the discussion boards, clinical reflection activities, quizzes, and direct transfer of course concepts into patient communication and care planning.

Expected Preparation

- Complete assigned lectures and readings within each two-week learning block.
- Complete quizzes or knowledge checks by the posted deadlines.
- Submit original discussion-board posts that are concise, thoughtful, clinically relevant, and connected to course material.
- Respond to peer posts in a way that advances the discussion rather than simply agreeing or restating the original post.
- Close the loop when peers or faculty ask follow-up questions.
- Practice applying pain concepts to real patient communication, assessment, and management decisions.

Discussion Board Expectations

Discussion boards are designed for application, not summary. Participants should use the discussion space to practice reasoning through pain complexity, patient communication, assessment decisions, and management strategies.

- Answer the prompt clearly and connect your response to assigned lectures, readings, or clinical experience.
- Use evidence and course concepts to support claims without making the post unnecessarily long.
- Explain how the idea would change what you say, assess, prioritize, or do with a patient.
- Respond to at least two peer posts when assigned and add a meaningful question, clarification, example, or alternative viewpoint.
- Maintain a respectful, professional tone, especially when discussing complex or differing viewpoints.
- Close the loop when peers or faculty engage with your post.

The expectation is not perfect certainty.

Strong pain reasoning does not mean having a perfect explanation for every symptom. It means listening carefully, forming a reasonable interpretation, identifying the factors most likely to matter, communicating in a way the patient can use, and updating the plan when the response or new information demands it.

Participation and Make-Up Policy

This course is asynchronous and does not include a weekend intensive lab or scheduled live virtual discussions.

Participation is demonstrated through completion of assigned lectures, readings, quizzes or knowledge checks, discussion-board posts, peer responses, and any assigned reflection activities.

Participants who miss a posted deadline or are unable to complete a required activity should follow faculty instructions for make-up work or deadline adjustment. Course credit requires completion of assigned course requirements unless otherwise approved by faculty.

Assessment and Completion Requirements

Assessment is intended to reinforce advanced pain reasoning, clinical application, and professional engagement. Participants may be evaluated through open-book knowledge checks, discussion-board participation, peer responses, reflective assignments, and applied clinical reasoning activities.

- Knowledge checks: Each block may include a short open-book/notes knowledge check covering assigned lectures and readings. Unless otherwise directed, knowledge checks are due by 11:59 PM EST on Sunday of the block's second week.
- Discussion boards: Original posts are due by 11:59 PM EST on Sunday of the block's first week unless otherwise directed. Peer responses are due by 11:59 PM EST on Wednesday of the block's second week unless otherwise directed.
- Course completion: Participants must complete assigned asynchronous materials, required quizzes or knowledge checks, discussion-board activities, peer responses, and any approved make-up work while demonstrating professional engagement.

Professional Expectations

- Engage respectfully with faculty and peers.
- Use evidence, patient experience, and clinical reasoning to support decisions.
- Avoid dismissive language when discussing pain, chronicity, psychosocial factors, or patient beliefs.
- Remain open to feedback, uncertainty, and clinical nuance.
- Communicate professionally during all course activities.
- Apply course concepts in a way that supports patient understanding, confidence, and self-management.

Course Materials

All course materials will be posted or made downloadable through Talent. Participants are responsible for downloading and reviewing assigned materials before completing each learning block, quiz, discussion-board post, and peer response.

Clinical Reasoning Standard

How strong performance is demonstrated

Strong specialist-level performance is demonstrated by clear thinking, patient-centered communication, appropriate use of evidence, willingness to acknowledge uncertainty, and the ability to connect pain assessment findings to education, management strategies, co-management decisions, and next-step planning.

Course Takeaway

By the end of this course, participants should not simply know more about pain terminology or pain neuroscience education. They should be better able to reason through pain complexity, communicate with greater precision, support behavior change, and design plans that help patients make sense of their pain and move forward with greater confidence.